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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2248  
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE 0433  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 0543  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE 4376

S E C R E T RIYADH 000038

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/05/2020  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [SA](#) [EG](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: SAUDI FOCUS ON PEACE TALKS DURING ABBAS VISIT  
SUGGESTS NEW, MORE ACTIVE APPROACH

REF: A. RIYADH 1683  
[1](#)B. 09 RIYADH 841 (NODIS)  
[1](#)C. 09 RIYADH 1905  
[1](#)D. 12/30/09 RUBINSTEIN/SMITH EMAIL  
[1](#)E. RIYADH 37

Classified By: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION LISA CARLE,  
REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

[1](#)1. (C) FOCUS ON PROSPECTS FOR PEACE: Palestine Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Dr. Mahir Karaki told Pol/Mil Counselor that President Mahmoud Abbas' December 30 meetings with King Abdullah and Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal focused on restarting Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Dr. Mahir observed that throughout the meetings, FM Saud evinced frustration at the lack of progress. For his part, Abbas was said to have assured the Saudis of his wish for renewed peace talks, but not in "negotiations only for the sake of negotiations."

[1](#)2. (C) ABBAS: "HAMAS PLAYING GAMES": In discussions on Fatah-Hamas reconciliation negotiations, Dr. Mahir said Abbas told the Saudis that Hamas was only "playing games," and taking instructions from Tehran and Damascus. Abbas reportedly also told the King he "was not bluffing" about his decision not to run for the presidency again, a message that Dr. Mahir said Abbas had also reaffirmed to Syrian President Asad recently. Dr. Mahir disclosed that Abbas planned to visit Damascus again in the very near future.

[1](#)3. (C) LAST MINUTE: Dr. Mahir mentioned that the visit occurred with little advance notice ) his Embassy was not aware of President Abbas' plans to visit Saudi Arabia until the day of the visit.

COMMENT: ABBAS BACK IN FAVOR?  
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[1](#)4. (C) Abbas, official reception on December 30 contrasted sharply with his previous visit to Riyadh last June (ref c) when King Abdullah kept him waiting for six hours and then summarily dismissed him after less than 20 minutes in a show of anger over public Palestinian complaints about Saudi miserliness. This time, FM Saud met Abbas at the airport, and escorted him to meetings with King Abdullah, Riyadh Governor Prince Salman, and lunch with newspaper editors, all prominently trumpeted by local media.

[1](#)5. (S/NF) The Saudis' new-found embrace of the Palestinian President suggests a new, more activist Saudi strategy vis a vis the Palestinians, perhaps in response to Egyptian prodding. In a readout of Mubarak's latest visit to Riyadh, the Egyptian DCM reported that the need to support the PA was high on the agenda. Responding to Saudi complaints about Abbas' role in Palestinian disunity, the Egyptians reportedly argued that the Arab side needed to look past Abbas at PA

institutions. Viable Palestinian statehood could only be built on the basis of institutions which were part of the PA but absent from Hamas-controlled Gaza. To achieve a Palestinian state, the Arab side therefore needed to encourage reconciliation and maintain the viability of PA institutions. This in turn meant supporting Abbas, for whom there was no alternative. Interestingly, Dr. Mahir's characterization of Abbas' meetings suggested that the Saudis were actually pushing Abbas to be more forthcoming. Separate readouts from PA officials in Jerusalem (ref d) seemed to corroborate renewed Saudi engagement in support of reconciliation and peace negotiations. The follow-on visit of Khalid Mish'al (ref e) and FM Saud's Jan 5 return trip to Damascus further suggests the re-emergence of Riyadh-Cairo-Damascus coordination. End comment.  
SMITH